

100-Year-Old Ozark Legend Still Plays a Mean Fiddle*

At 100, Violet Hensley still plays a mean fiddle. You can hear her in Silver Dollar City in Branson, where she has played and crafted fiddles for the past 50 years.

But her famed fiddle playing is also known around the world. Hensley was featured on “The Beverly Hillbillies,” “Captain Kangaroo,” “Live! With Regis and Kathie Lee,” and countless other radio and TV shows. She became one of the first woman fiddlers to reach a large international audience, appearing at the Smithsonian’s Festival of American Folklife.

Hensley learned to fiddle in 1928 and then make fiddles from watching her father, in their home in the Arkansas Ozark Mountains. Her mother died when she was 11, and she learned quickly how to take care of the house, plow, mend and make harnesses for their dirt farm.

Hensley’s daughter, Sandy Flagg, says one of her mother’s biggest dreams came true last August, just two months before Hensley turned 100. Hensley played on the Grand Ole Opry, bringing the house down with her rendition of Stephen Foster’s “Angeline the Baker.”

In an interview on KY3 TV in Springfield, Missouri, Hensley gave the following advice for living to 100.

"Don't drink beer, whisky, or wine, and love yourself and everybody else. I just live my life everyday as it comes. You're not going to live but one life, you might as well enjoy it while you're at it."

**Much of the information in this story comes from the book “Whittlin’ and Fiddlin’ My Own Way: The Violet Hensley Story.”*